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Domesticating Otherness: Culture-Specific References in French Covers of Bob Dylan's Songs

One recurrent obstacle when translating foreign literature is the challenge of transferring the multiple Culture-Specific References that make sense to the source audience but are much less meaningful – if not entirely obscure – to the target audience. The presence of footnotes as a way to overcome this obstacle is a subject that is often discussed among translators. In the case of song translation, however, footnotes are not an option at all. In addition, the Target Work must be readily understandable in order for it to be as effective as the Source Work. This excludes the possibility of leaving the reference untranslated, as is sometimes the case in a novel, with the assumption that the readers will close the book and do some research before they go on with their reading. As a result, the various strategies adopted by song translators range from domestication – adapting the reference by replacing it with a similar one borrowed from the target culture – to deleting these traces of Otherness altogether. I shall study several examples of songs written by Bob Dylan and adapted into French by various translators (Hugues Aufray, Roger Mason, Sarclo...) in order to scrutinize the choices that were made by these performers from the 1960s to today.